

2022-02-01: RCMP Briefing Notes for Premier Kenney for Trucker Convoy Blockade

Background:

- On January 29, 2022, a convoy of semi trucks and passenger vehicles travelled to the Coutts border (via Highway 4) to protest COVID-19 mandates (including but not limited to, the cross-border vaccination health orders applicable to truck drivers transporting goods).
- We estimated that approximately 1000 vehicles stretched over 46 km of roadway made up the convoy.
- The size of this convoy caused us concern from the outset, as we recognized that we had limited lawful authority to stop the protest before any offences were committed.
- This was held in conjunction with 9 other protest events spread across the province, as well as RCMP assisting Edmonton Police Service with multiple convoys coming into the city from numerous directions.
- All of the protests (aside from Coutts) ended without incident.
- RCMP engaged early with the protest organizers, and it was made clear to them that we would not tolerate road blockages and any unlawful activity, and any activity to the contrary would have serious consequences. Recognizing that we were willing to tolerate some traffic slow-downs, at no time were they given permission to block the roadways completely.
- We had to rely from the relationship that was built with the organizers, and original assurances were obtained from the organizers that they planned to circle the area but maintain one lane of traffic open, and no blockades would be created.
- A splinter group broke off and created a complete blockage of both highway lanes.
- We recognized that there were people with vehicles caught up in the blockade that wanted to leave but were unable to, and this would lead to issues of them running short of food, fuel, etc. This included approximately 30 semi trucks that had cleared customs and were trapped in the border clearance parking lot.
- Bringing in additional resources to the area involves consideration for the time it takes to travel to the area from elsewhere in the province.

Objectives:

- 1) Have traffic moving through the border and maintain an open passage for traffic in the area.
- 2) Ensure that no additional protestors attend or reinforce the current blockade.

3) Ensure a proper investigational team is in place to gather information / evidence for successful prosecutions.

History / Chronology:

- At the beginning, we could not identify the splinter groups or the leaders of these groups. We had to rely on the organizers to communicate with the groups, and this communication quickly disintegrated.

Sunday

- Started bringing in extra resources, challenges with travel time and logistics for accommodations, etc
- RCMP investigators have been engaged in communication with the event participants, identifying a number of participants who attended in the first instance for support, but now wish to leave but cannot due to their position within the blockade.
- A joint initiative between RCMP, CBSA, and the US Customs and Border Services was completed which involved escorting approximately 30 semi trucks that were stuck just north of the border (in the border clearance lot), to a secondary roadway which allowed the trucks to re-enter Highway 4 and head northbound once past the blockages.
- Strategic traffic checkpoints have been established to re-route southbound traffic away from the Coutts congestion.

Monday

- The RCMP Consultative Conflict Management Group (CCMG) continues trying to engage protest participants, however, the engagement from the organizers has diminished since the beginning of the blockage.
- RCMP focused on cooperation because of the size and complexity of this event
- The RCMP was approached by the splinter group leaders to start negotiations
- In the morning, approx 32 trucks (those trapped, wishing to leave but couldn't), were allowed to leave by the splinter group organizers
- The dialogue between the RCMP and splinter groups was indicative of a positive outcome at the beginning, this diminished throughout the day
- In the early evening, splinter group organizers answered a firm "no" to any negotiation of options for the protest and removing the blockade
- Protestors are being supplied with food, alcohol, and supplies by people driving pickup trucks across farmland and through ditches, avoiding the checkpoints.
- It is estimated there were more than 200 semi trucks and passenger vehicles still engaged in the blockade.

- Sheriffs and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement (CVE) have been engaged and are at strategic locations for the other border crossings to ensure only legitimate commercial traffic passes through.
- The group is using a number of social media channels to convey information and communicate police presence and locations.
- Tow companies were on standby throughout the day, however, there is a challenge in finding companies that have the capability to tow semi trucks and are willing to participate due to social media and backlash they are experiencing.
- Assurances were obtained from the tow companies that they would return tomorrow (Tuesday) to provide service
- In the evening, a decision was made to proceed with enforcement and vehicle removal the following day, as the night hours created safety issues and the lack of tow support presented a logistical challenge.

Tuesday

- All of the tow companies that assurances had been received from have now cancelled, creating a need to line up alternate tow resources (despite compensation for their service). Other companies approached that have the capability to move semi trucks are being approached.
- RCMP is preparing for engagement and centralizing resources for the police removal of the blockades.
- Investigators continue to try and deescalate the situation through voluntary compliance.
- Multiple arrests are planned to occur today, if required. We are hoping that once this starts to occur, many will leave voluntarily.
- RCMP extra resources are being put in place for extended operations.
- Other agencies such as Lethbridge Regional Police and Calgary Police Public Order Units have been engaged to support the RCMP as required.
- Consideration has to be given that the splinter group has a lot of support, and other groups are coming in to reinforce them
- Legal considerations are being taken into account due to possible shortages of judges and information for prosecutions.
- Areas to secure the towed vehicles and security for tow companies is being planned.

Complexity / Challenges:

- The large number of vehicles involved and the size of the vehicles involved present major challenges for access and removal.
- Location of the blockade: lack of major roadways in the area, especially those accessible to semi trucks, makes it difficult to identify alternate access and exit routes.
- The large, open rural area makes it difficult to establish secure access points and a containment perimeter, due to the size of the area, multiple access points, and protest

supporters' ability to bypass roadways and travel through farmlands. This creates safety concerns for police and support personnel involved, as this creates an opportunity for protest sympathizers to surround the police and create harm.

- Information being put out through social media and through discussions with protestors has involved mention of violence and firearms involvement, which presents a high risk to police and public safety.
- If warranted, mass arrests will be needed to deal with the number of protestors. When these occur, there are many additional challenges that arise, including but not limited to: resourcing for arrest execution; prisoner processing and holding; and proceeding to court with charges.
- Engaging local businesses, such as tow companies for vehicle removal, is proving difficult as local businesses do not want to be perceived as taking one side (either the police's side or the protestors' side). This is further complicated by the fact that this is a small rural area, where many people are known to each other.
- Numerous resources are required to deal with these types of events, and these are pulled from across the province, which creates strain on the organization while it maintains its policing obligations to the entire province, as well as dealing with the resource shortages impacted by the pandemic.
- There are a number of agencies involved, including the USA, and coordination of solutions between multiple agencies is complex. The lack of CBSA engagement at the beginning of the event made it difficult to establish options and strategies.
- Lack of appropriate equipment is a major hurdle, resourcing is sufficient
- We have support from other police agencies, including CPS, LRPS, Sheriffs/CVE, and CBSA and US Customs & Border Services

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